

THE FUTURE LANGUAGES OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

A Pilot Study.

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Author: Arttu Summanen Title of thesis: The future languages of international business
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Objectives The main objective of this study was to find out what language will be the most relevant in the field of international business in the future and to identify criteria for determining the potentially most relevant languages for international business in the future
Summary The study aimed to find an answer to the research problem: What criteria should be used to determine the relative importance of a language for international business? First, the criteria were chosen based on earlier research. Then the criteria were analyzed individually and weighted based on the impact they have on the relevance of a language. Using the methods mentioned above, it was found that English will keep its position as the main global business language but some languages, such as Indonesian, might drastically increase in relevance due to their respective countries' emerging markets.
Conclusions English will remain as the main international business language for the unforeseeable future due to its established status and the amount of people currently learning it. Some languages that were projected to become the next big world languages, such as Chinese, are held back by their notorious difficulty. Depending on whether the forecasts regarding the next emerging markets hold true, many languages might increase their status by a lot in the near future. Especially if Latin American countries' economy will improve as projected, the relevance Spanish and Portuguese as major business languages will increase a plenty.
Key words: <i>Languages, Future, Communication, Globalization</i>
Language: English
Grade:

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In the era of globalization, languages and language learning has become a hot topic. Multinational companies ponder what language they should impose as an internal company language, and if giving their employees additional language training would bring them a competitive advantage. As being able to fluently communicate in two or more languages can facilitate doing business as well as hasten internal knowledge transferring in companies, and alter the position of power between partners, employers have valid reasons for favoring multilingual hires (Charles, 2007). Individuals, such as business students, contemplate if learning a certain language would make them stand out in the job market, and consider the benefits that might come with it.

There does not seem to be comprehensive and up-to-date research that would answer the questions introduced above. There has been research done that looks at a certain factor, such as a country's economic state, and measures how it affects the demand for a certain language, but it is difficult to find research that would measure the relevance of languages based on multiple factors. And that is exactly what this thesis aims to do, to measure the future importance of languages based on the important factors combined. Since multiple factors are measured in the study, a points-system has been created to properly emphasize certain factors over others, in order to get more accurate results.

There is not any data available that would measure the future relevance of languages in international business based on multiple factors. This study will try to do that, and to achieve that, a weighted points-system is created to give the right emphasis to the right factors

1.2. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What languages will be the most relevant in international business in the future?
2. What languages would be the most useful to learn for international business purposes?

3. What are the main criteria for evaluating the importance of individual languages for IB?

1.3. Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:

1. To define which factors affect the relevance of a language the most, and utilize them in solving the research questions.
2. To find out what are the most important languages in international business now and in the future.
3. To examine criteria, and create a tentative scoring system for evaluating the relevant importance of individual languages for IB.

1.4. Research Problem

The research problem of this study is:

What criteria should be used to determine the relative importance of a language for international business?

2. Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to examine briefly what we know about the position and prevalence of what can currently be taken to be the biggest languages in the world and examine their role as global language. This review will form the basis for an examination of the future potential of these biggest languages to increase their significance as a language of global business. First, an overview of the benefits of learning a language is given, followed by the effect of globalization on company language. Then the chapter moves on to give the reader an understanding of what makes a language big, followed by conclusions drawn from each section.

2.1. Benefits of learning foreign languages

Why should one learn a foreign language? Scholars agree that there is a long list of benefits that language learning enjoys. In this part, the benefits have been divided into 4 categories: Benefits for companies operating internationally, social benefits, cognitive benefits, and career benefits.

benefits for companies operating internationally

Companies that do business internationally have seen the usefulness of having multilingual employees in effect. Having employees who can fluently communicate in both the company's language and the target country's languages has proven to be very beneficial for many companies, both in terms of closing deals and retaining already existing customers ((Bordia and Bordia, 2014).

social benefits

Perhaps the most obvious benefit of learning a new language is being able to talk to new people that you might not have been able to talk to otherwise. Depending on the language one chooses to learn, an opportunity to communicate with up to one billion new people arises, opening doors left and right (Richards, 2015). The benefits of learning a language are not simply limited to being able to talk to new people. Moreover language learners acquire a number of skills while at it (Krizman et al., 2012). The acquired skills include becoming a better overall communicator, a better listener, learning to recognize linguistic nuance and differences in meaning (Krizman et al., 2012). Studies have shown that

multilingual children have, on average, better social skills than monolingual children, and thus are able to create deeper bonds and stronger relationships with people (Fan et al., 2015). In the process of learning a new language, the learner acquires a better understanding of their own language, and upon achieving fluency in one language, learning new languages becomes increasingly easier (Leopold, 2009).

cognitive benefits

Many cognitive developments have been found to be linked to language learning. According to a study made by Julia Morales, children who are learning a second language are able to recall memories better than monolinguals (Morales et al., 2013). In tests of verbal and non-verbal intelligence, multilinguals have been found to score higher than monolinguals (Peal & Lambert, 1962). Other benefits of knowing multiple languages include improved attention span (Bialystok and Craik, 2010), being more creative (Bamford and Mizokawa, 1991) and improved problem-solving skills (Nicolay and Poncelet, 2012). Multilingualism has even been found to slow down brain decline that comes with aging, possibly even postponing the symptoms of certain diseases, such as Alzheimer's (Bak et al., 2014). Although so many studies confirm the cognitive benefits of language learning, it is good to note that some studies have disputed some of the cognitive benefits that come from learning languages (Paap & Greenberg 2013). For example, a recent meta-analysis shows that there was no link between multilingualism and improved multitasking skills (Lehtonen et al., 2018).

career benefits

Besides just improving the looks of one's cv, knowing multiple languages can do wonders for a person's career. In a survey made for 581 alumni of business school in Arizona, over 50% of the respondents stated to have gained a competitive advantage from their knowledge of other languages (Grosse, 2004). The respondents said that knowing multiple languages was often the decisive factor when they had gotten hired (Grosse, 2004). Knowing languages also increases job security, as it is harder to replace workers who have language skills. Research made by Samuel Johnson found that knowing a foreign language in Great Britain lead to significant monetary bonuses over time (Johnson, 2014). This bonus trend is illustrated in Figure 1.

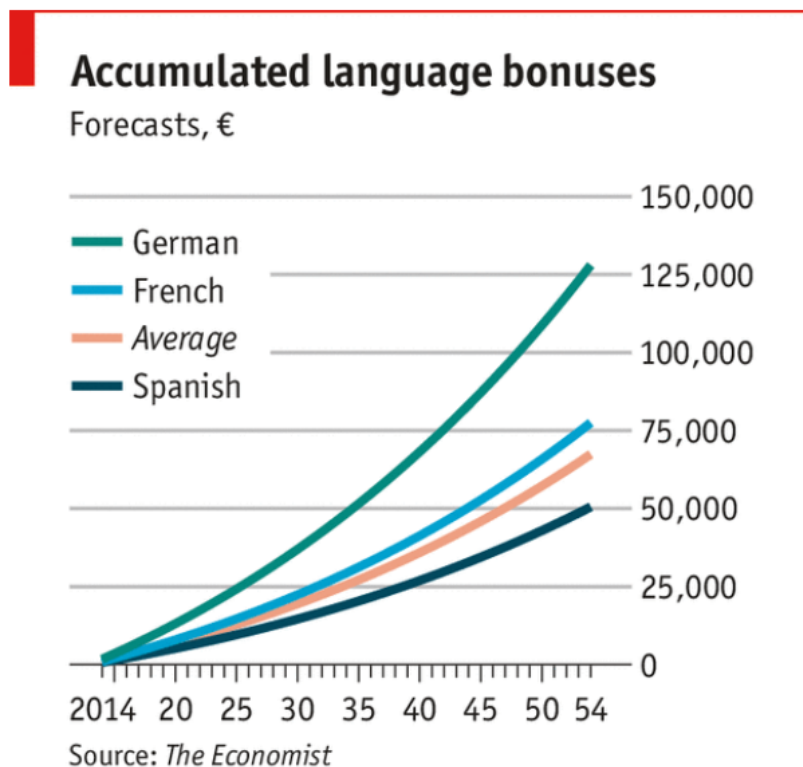


Figure 1: Accumulated language bonuses (Johnson, 2014)

As we can see from the figure, the research forecasted that, for example knowing German could add up to over 125,000€ in bonuses over a person's career (Johnson, 2014). Though it is important to note that the monetary benefits of knowing a language depend on the demand for the language, and on the country in question (Johnson, 2014). Employees who are already familiar with the language and culture of a foreign market into which a company is expanding, can turn out to become a valuable asset for the company (Piekkari et al, 2014). Also, as discussed later in the thesis, the official and the internal company languages might not be the same, bringing internal climbing opportunities to those who speak both the official and the internal language (Sherman and Strubell, 2013).

2.2. Choice of language to be learnt

Why do people generally learn languages? Research shows that there is no general consensus on this topic, in fact, the responses tend to vary a lot from person to person. In a survey conducted by English as a Second Language – a company that organizes study abroad trips – they found that the main reasons for learning a foreign language were: For

work, for studies, fondness of the language, the language is spoken where I live, and to speak with people who speak the language (Boveda, 2013).

In another major survey conducted by Babbel – a language learning website – only 8% of the respondents said that they study a language mainly for job / career purposes (Jordan, 2016). The main motivators for language learning in the survey were stated as: 1. to communicate better when travelling 2. out of interest in the language 3. to keep mentally fit. Other reason that came up in many surveys was to learn the language for one's family / significant other (Jordan, 2016).

2.3. Role of languages in companies

globalization

Globalization has changed the way business is conducted drastically; the business world has become practically borderless and the importance of language and cultural knowledge has increased tenfold (Beck, 2018). For example, if an American company wishes to do business with the Chinese, it is practically mandatory to have an employee that can bridge the gap between the highly differing cultures (Branstetter and Lardy, 2006). More and more companies start off their businesses globally, expanding their business abroad right away in hopes of tripling or quadrupling their cash flows (Beck, 2018). With globalization also came a massively increased demand for multilingual professionals, which is often not met (Pawle, 2013). Scholars seem to agree that globalization is not just a trend, it came to stay and its effects will only expand in the unforeseeable future (Thompson et al., 2015).

multinationals

With globalization multinational companies became more common. Multinational companies face an important issue regarding internal communication. As they have employees from all over the world, who speak different languages, the companies must set an official company language, which is more often than not English (Tenzer et al., 2013). However, the official company language often gets diluted since internal communication language is at times different than the official company language, bringing huge advantages to rise the ladder to the people who know both or all languages fluently (Angouri, 2013). Managers try to tackle this problem by being flexible and resort to using “what works” instead to trying to enforce the company's language rules (Angouri, 2013).

language of communication

Although English has become the assumed language of communication in many cases when international trade is conducted, just knowing English is often not enough (Selmier and Oh, 2012). Customers enjoy being able to get customer service in their own language and having multilingual employees who are able to speak to locals their local language has proved to be extremely important for customer retention (Selmier and Oh, 2012). The competition for customers has become fiercer due to globalization and having customer service available in a target language has been proven to produce significant financial benefits (Brannen, Piekkari and Tietze, 2017). On the other hand, not having the language resources can have the opposite effect; Professor James Foreman-Peck estimated that the UK loses up to £48bn a year due to having a deficit of multilingual professionals (Pawle, 2013).

2.4. Lingua franca

Cambridge dictionary defines the term lingua franca as “a language used for communication between groups of people who speak different languages.” (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). Lingua francas connect different nations and cultures through a common spoken language (Brosch, 2015). Scholars have discussed whether having a global lingua franca would be an opportunity to connect all people or a threat for smaller, disappearing languages (House, 2003).

Different languages in different regions have functioned as lingua francas throughout history, some of the most widespread ones in their respective points of time include: Arabic, Latin, Greek, French and English (Karlfried and Meierkord, 2002). In recent years English has strengthened its position so much that it is currently considered as the global business lingua franca, and the term BELF (business English as lingua franca) has become common in academic research (Marinel and Nickerson, 2009). Although English is a dominant language in the world of business, that does not mean that other lingua francas do not exist in today's world. For example, Spanish is considered as a lingua franca in most of Latin America and Russian respectively in the area of the old Soviet Union (Mattila, 2016). Lingua francas will be discussed more in depth later in this thesis

2.5. What makes a language 'big'?

In order to give forecasts of the future, one must first analyse the past and the current situation. In this chapter, we will take a comprehensive look at the current and/or past statistics of factors that affect the relevance of a language. The factors considered in this study have repeatedly emerged in literature and could be considered as the most significant ones.

2.5.1. Evaluated number of speakers and the countries in which the language is spoken

Below is the top ten list of the most spoken languages currently, based on the number of total speakers (native and second language speakers combined).

Language	Number of native speakers (in millions)	Number of total speakers (in millions)	Number of countries in which it is recognized as an official language
Mandarin Chinese	908.7	1.121	2-3**
English	442.3	1.107	58
Spanish	378.2	697.4	20
Hindi-Urdu*	329.1	512.9	3
Arabic	290	422	26
Bengali	242.6	284.9	2
Portuguese	222.7	281	10
Russian	153.9	264.3	4
Japanese	128.2	261.8	1
Western Punjabi	119	236.5	1

Table 1: Number of native speakers, total speakers, and number of countries in which the languages are recognized official (Ethnologue, 2018)

* Hindi & Urdu speakers are often added together due to the two languages being mutually intelligible for the most part (Ethnologue.com)

** Mandarin Chinese is spoken in 2 or 3 countries depending on whether or not you recognize Taiwan as an independent country. There has been a lot of controversy regarding the topic due to the unwillingness of the Chinese government to recognize Taiwan as independent (Leng, 2018)

Source for the statistics above: Ethnologue.com – an encyclopaedia of the world's languages (updated in November 2018). It is important to note that the numbers are purely estimates, it is virtually impossible to have completely accurate information on the amount of speakers, which is why the numbers always vary from source to source. All statistics were taken from the same source for coherence reasons. The bigger picture of the estimates seems to be the same no matter what source one is looking at. It is also good to note that the estimates were made in November 2018, which was about 1,5 years before the writing of this thesis, so the estimates might be a few million off the actual current numbers (+/- x million speakers)

The biggest changes in the number of speakers in recent years have been caused by the massive population growths of China and India (Simon, 2019). As a result of the population exploding in numbers, their respective languages have also grown in importance and spread globally (Simon, 2019). Another notable change has been seen in the number of English speakers. More and more people started learning English as a second language, because it has managed to solidify its role as the assumed language of business and international relations in recent years (Jenkins and Leung, 2013).

2.5.2. Economic power and emerging markets

How do economic power of countries and the emerging markets affect the relevance of the language? Economic power of a country is linked to the relevance of its respective language in international trade (Egger and Lassmann, 2012). In this chapter languages are ranked based on the countries' economies where the languages are recognized as an official language. It is important to note that while some languages are recognized as an official language in only one country, other languages are recognized in many countries. For

example, Spanish is an official language in 20 different countries, thus, the economies of those countries should be looked at collectively.

Below is the top ten list of the biggest economies in the world measured by estimations of nominal GDP.

Country	GDP (US\$million) [Nominal GDP]
United States	21,439,453
China	14,140,163
Japan	5,154,475
Germany	3,863,344
India	2,935,570
United Kingdom	2,743,586
France	2,707,074
Italy	1,988,636
Brazil	1,847,020
Canada	1,730,914

Table 2: Countries listed by nominal GDP (IMF, 2019)

As we can see from the table, just like in the case of the number of speakers, India and China have experienced the biggest changes in terms of nominal GDP in the recent years, making up the leeway on the United States, the country that has been on the top of list for decades (Kummu et al, 2018). China's GDP measured by purchasing power parity already once surpassed the equivalent of the US in 2017 (IMF, 2017).

Top 5 languages based on the current nominal GDPs of countries

1. English
2. Mandarin Chinese
3. Japanese
4. German
5. Hindi & other official languages of India

2.5.3. Lingua franca status in geographic areas

Having lingua franca status is pivotal for a language's importance, as people start using it and depending on it as a tool of communication between different nationalities (Karlfried and Meierkord, 2002)

French remains to be a language that connects nations in western Europe, but it is not the prominent, must-know language it used to be. French used to be the main language of diplomacy for almost three centuries, before English overtook that role (H-Diplo, 2010). France left its mark in Africa from the colonization times in the form of the French language. Of the 212 million people who use French daily, 54.7% are living in Africa (RTBF, 2014). As shown in the map made by RTBF, French is very widespread especially in the countries of western Africa. Though it is important to remember that English is also widely spoken in many parts of Africa, which competes against the popularity of French (RTBF, 2014). French language's influence in Africa is illustrated in the figure below.

Percentage of people speaking french in francophone africa

According to the O.I.F

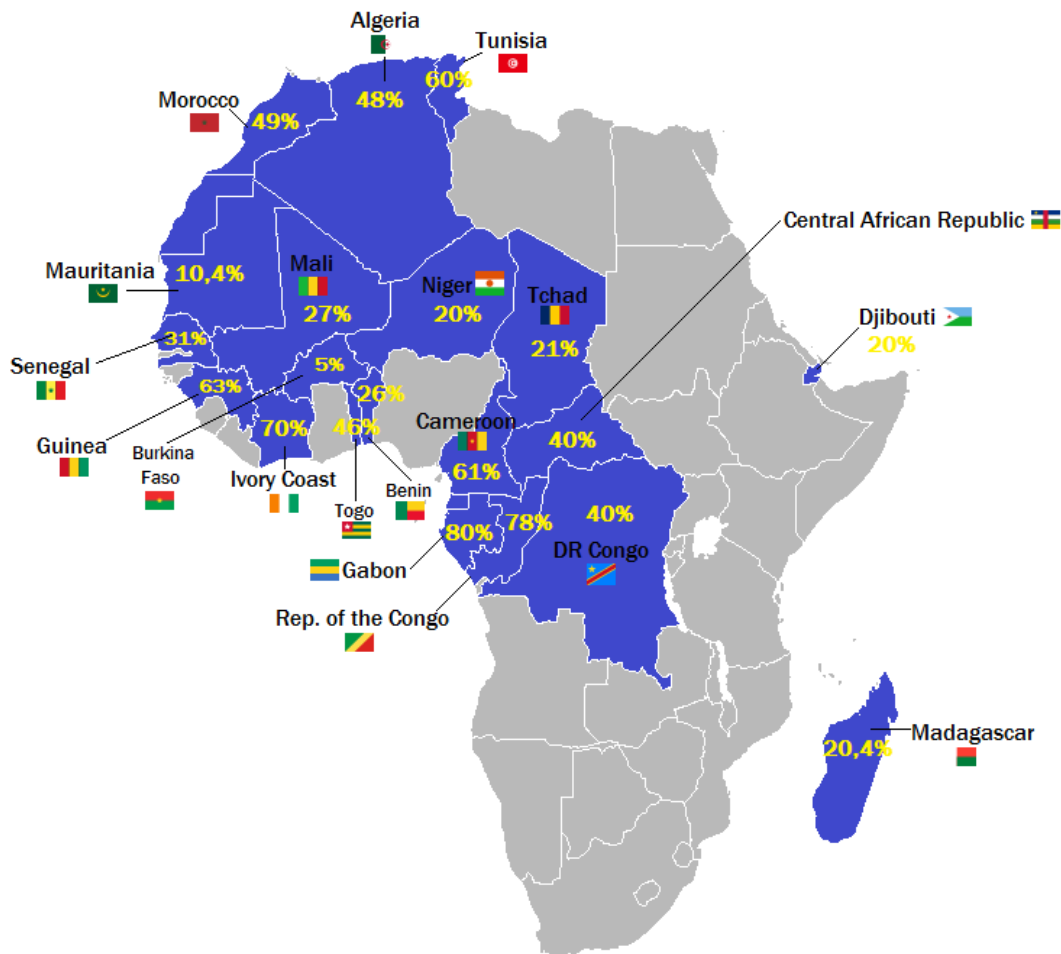


Figure 2: Percentage of people speaking French in francophone africa (RTBF, 2014)

Mandarin Chinese functions as a lingua franca in China. Mandarin provides the Chinese a way to communicate to people, who, instead of using Mandarin, use one of the 200+ Chinese dialects in their daily life. Most of these dialects are completely unintelligible to the speakers of other dialects (Liu, 2012). The Chinese government has done its best to standardize Mandarin Chinese written by simplified characters all over China, Taiwan & Hong Kong (Ye, 2013). However, the situation is quite problematic. Cantonese dialect rules the independent, the business epicentre, Hong Kong. And traditional characters are still use in some parts of China despite the government's efforts (Ye, 2013). Thus, the large region

is not completely unified by one language. Also as mentioned later in this thesis, Chinese is notorious for being one of the hardest (if not the hardest) languages in the world to learn (Ye, 2013). The difficulty of the language has reduced people's willingness to learn Chinese drastically (Ye, 2013). What does not help the case of Chinese is that the young people in China speak increasingly better English, which is the current business lingua franca (Fang, 2016).

Hindi is the most spoken language in India with about 57% of the population being able to communicate in the language (Indian government, 2011). However, it is not the only major language in India. English and Bengali are also spoken across India, with 129 and 107 million speakers respectively (Abbi, 2012). Hindi and Urdu are mutually intelligible, and some people categorize Hindi and Urdu as variants of the same language, which is why in statistics Hindi/Urdu speakers are shown in the same column (Bhatt, 2005).

Arabic is a major language that connects people in parts of Africa and across Sahara. Arabic dialects are not always mutually intelligible, which complicates the language's cohesiveness (Versteegh, 2014). Arabic is the primary spoken language in many of the countries marked in the map below, such as in Egypt and Syria (Sawe, 2018).



Figure 3: Arabic speaking countries (Sawe, 2018)

Russian is still the lingua franca in the area of the old Soviet Union, even many years after the collapse of the old sovereign state (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2014). Although many of the smaller countries in the area have their own language, such as Belarusian and Kazakh, it is usually expected that the people who speak those languages also are able to speak at least decent-level Russian (Pavlenko, 2006).

Spanish is the lingua franca of the entire Latin and Central America except for Brazil and a handful of small countries (Stewart, 2012). Spanish also used to be in a sense the lingua franca in Europe in the 16th century before the role got taken over by French and English (Godenzzi, 2006). The Spanish-speaking population has been growing exceptionally fast in the USA, making the language more widespread in the process (Stewart, 2012). According to the US census bureau, in 2017 there were already almost 59 million Hispanic/Latino people in the USA (US Census Bureau 2017).

Besides being the primary language many major nations such as USA, England and Australia, English has also become the global standard business language (Lacey, 2013). It has become the assumed language of communication in borders crossing business when the two nations in questions do not share the same first language, and in the process grasping decent English skills has turned from an useful asset into an absolute requirement in many fields (Ku and Zussman, 2010). A telling sign of the prominence of English is that it is estimated to be the most studied language by a landslide, with approximated 1,5 billion learners (Ammon et al, 2013).

2.5.4. How hard is the language to learn?

The harder the language is to learn, the more unlikely it is to become a prominent, borders-crossing language of communication (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Especially if there is already an established common language that people learn for that exact purpose (Kumaravadivelu, 2012).

FSI, the Foreign Service Institute of the United States, has created guiding graph for measuring how difficult it is to learn a certain language (how long it takes to achieve general fluency in a language) (FSI). It is important to note that the estimated numbers are based on the time that it takes English-speaking people to learn the language. So, if a language learner's native language is not English, the number of hours it takes to learn a certain language might vary quite a bit from the numbers presented in the graph below. For example, Japanese and Chinese share some of the same characters, making Chinese easier to learn for Japanese native speakers and the other way around (Marsden et al, 2013). Also, if two languages belong in the same language family, a lot of the vocabulary and grammar will be "shared" or be very alike. This gives a huge advantage for example, to a French native learning Spanish, since both Spanish and French belong in the romance language-family (Marsden et al, 2013). However, the graph is directional and can be considered accurate, since it is universally agreed that the languages that have their own writing systems and sounds take massive amounts of time and dedication to learn. Below is the graph in question.

Category I: Languages closely related to English 23-24 weeks (575-600 class hours)		
Danish Dutch French	Italian Norwegian Portuguese	Romanian Spanish Swedish
Category II: Languages with significant linguistic and/or cultural differences from English 44 weeks (1100 class hours)		
Albanian Amharic Armenian Azerbaijani Bengali Bosnian Bulgarian Burmese Croatian Czech *Estonian *Finnish *Georgian Greek	Hebrew Hindi *Hungarian Icelandic Khmer Lao Latvian Lithuanian Macedonian *Mongolian Nepali Pashto Persian Polish	Russian Serbian Sinhalese Slovak Slovenian Tagalog *Thai Turkish Ukrainian Urdu Uzbek *Vietnamese Xhosa Zulu
Category III: Languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers 88 weeks (2nd year of study in-country) (2200 class hours)		
Arabic Cantonese	Mandarin *Japanese	Korean
Other languages		
German	30 weeks (750 class hours)	
Indonesian, Malaysian, Swahili	36 weeks (900 class hours)	

* Languages preceded by asterisks are typically somewhat more difficult for native English speakers to learn than other languages in the same category.

Table 3: Language difficulty (FSI, n.d.)

How long it takes to become fluent in English changes quite a bit depending on the source. Researcher Feyisa Demie suggests that it takes pupils 5-7 years to reach academic fluency when attending English classes a few times a week (Demie, 2013). According to the CEFR scale it takes around 200 hours to pass each level from A1 to C2 To put this into hours it could mean 800-1200 hours of studying depending on how “fluent” is defined and what kind of language learning background the student has (Council of Europe).

More about the topic of language difficulty in the analysis section of the thesis.

2.5.5. The need for language other than English, citizens’ fluency in other languages

If the citizens of a country speak other languages well, especially English which is the current business lingua franca, there is reduced need and lesser incentives for others to learn the language of that country (Gardner, 2014).

Education First, a language education organization measures the English proficiency of the natives of different countries by testing their abilities in research that is conducted yearly (EF, 2019). Table 3 shows some findings.

English proficiency in countries where English is not an official language (By EF, English proficiency index)

Very High Proficiency			High Proficiency		Moderate Proficiency						
01	Netherlands	70.27	15	Hungary	61.86	30	Costa Rica	57.38	39	Uruguay	54.08
02	Sweden	68.74	16	Romania	61.36	31	France	57.25	40	China	53.44
03	Norway	67.93	17	Serbia	61.30	32	Latvia	56.85	41	Macau, China	53.34
04	Denmark	67.87	18	Kenya	60.51	33	Hong Kong, China	55.63	42	Chile	52.89
05	Singapore	66.82	19	Switzerland	60.23	34	India	55.49	43	Cuba	52.70
06	South Africa	65.38	20	Philippines	60.14	35	Spain	55.46	44	Dominican Republic	52.58
07	Finland	65.34	21	Lithuania	60.11	36	Italy	55.31	45	Paraguay	52.51
08	Austria	64.11	22	Greece	59.87	37	South Korea	55.04	46	Guatemala	52.50
09	Luxembourg	64.03	23	Czech Republic	59.30	38	Taiwan, China	54.18			
10	Germany	63.77	24	Bulgaria	58.97						
11	Poland	63.76	25	Slovakia	58.82						
12	Portugal	63.14	26	Malaysia	58.55						
13	Belgium	63.09	27	Argentina	58.38						
14	Croatia	63.07	28	Estonia	58.29						
			29	Nigeria	58.26						

Table 4: English proficiency index (EF, 2019)

More on the topic of English proficiency in the analysis section of the thesis

2.5.6. Other factors

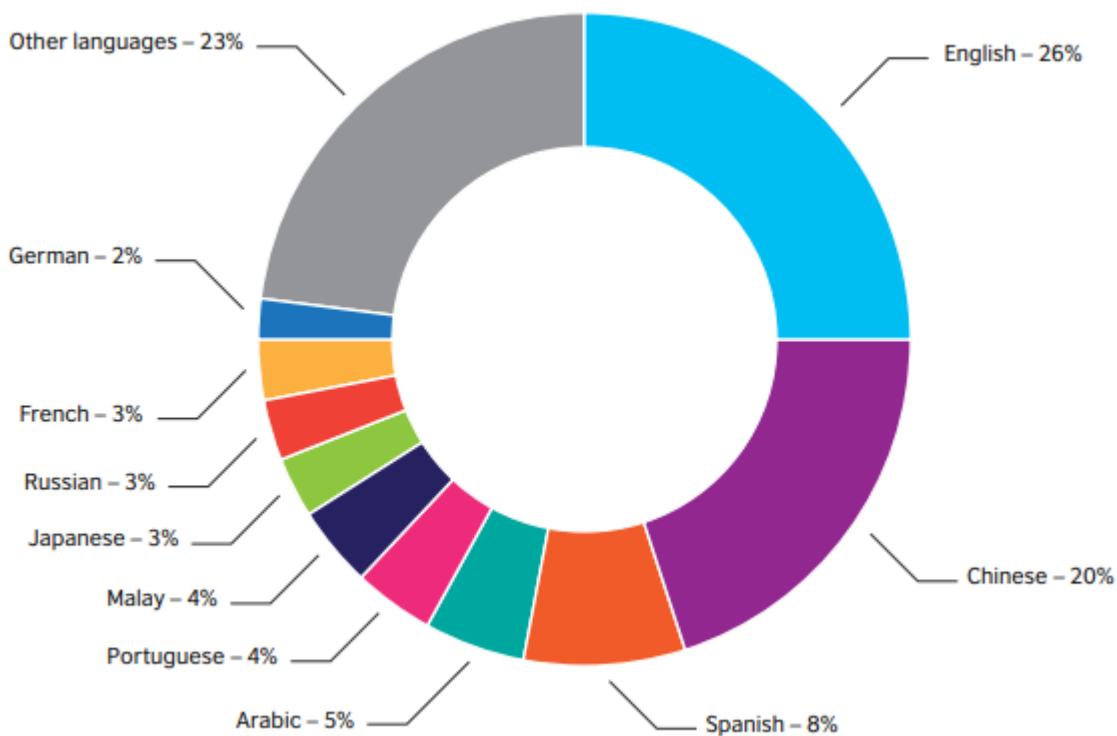
In this section we will take a closer look at two factors: languages of the internet and the most studied languages. It is important to note that when a reference to 'other factors' is made, only languages of the internet and the most studied languages are considered as one. No other factor, such as the political status of a language, is considered in the context of 'other factors'.

Languages of the internet

With internet came the access to practically unlimited information. Internet has changed language learning drastically as well created a way to communicate with different nationalities from around the world. It is important to note that not all information is translated into all languages. In this sense, some languages are more useful to understand than others.

The chart below, Languages of internet (chart taken from the British council languages of the future 2017 report) shows the amount of information available in the respective languages.

Chart 13: Internet use by language 2017



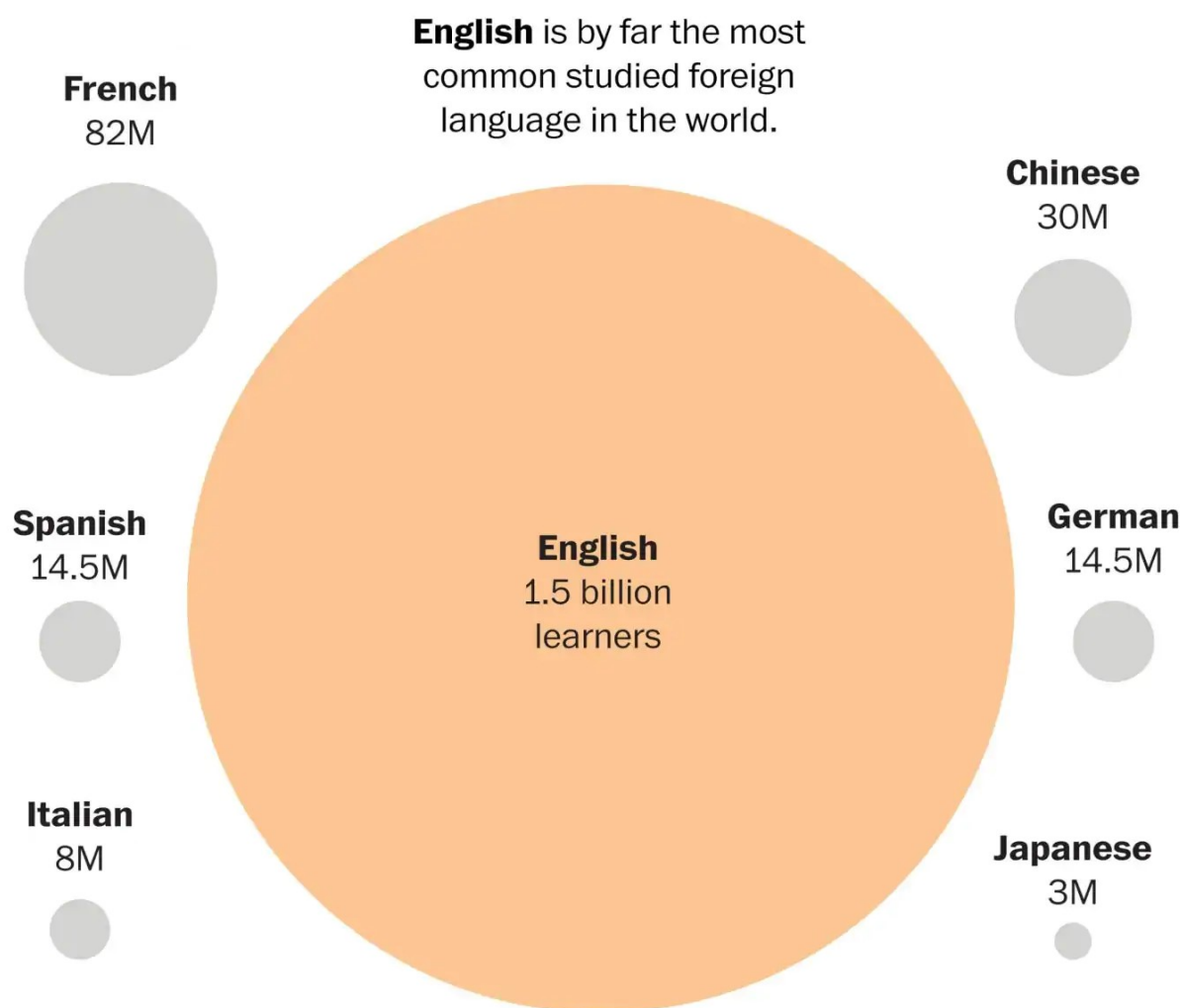
Source: Internet World Stats ⁷¹

Figure 4: Internet use by language 2017 (British council, 2017)

As we can see from the figure, over 50% of the content in the internet is dominated by 3 languages: English, Chinese and Spanish. Also, over 75% of the content consists of 10 languages, which is quite astonishing considering that there are an estimated 6500 spoken languages in the world as of 2020 (Ethnologue, 2020). Over one fourth of the entire information in the internet is written in English, which is a telling sign of the language's status. Chinese is the second most popular language of the internet with 20%. It is important to note, that Chinese language is written in Chinese characters, so the text is completely unintelligible to those who are only familiar with the Latin alphabet.

Most studied languages

People tend to study the languages that they deem most useful for themselves in the future (Noack, 2015). The figure below shows the most studied languages in the world.



Sources: Ulrich Ammon, University of Düsseldorf

THE WASHINGTON POST

Figure 5: Most studied languages (Ammon, 2013)

As we can see from the figure, there is one language that stands out from the rest. English had a whopping 1,5 billion learners as of 2013 and the total number keeps growing year by year (Ammon, 2013). French is the second most popular language in terms of people learning it, perhaps due to the romanticizing of the language in media. Surprisingly few people study Chinese, likely due to its notorious difficulty.

2.6. Conclusions

Learning languages has proven to have numerous individual, social and career-related benefits. Due to the world becoming ever more global, the demand for multilingual professional keeps on increasing. The topics covered in this literature review form the basis for projections of the future relevance of languages, which will be discussed in the following analysis chapter.

Many factors affect the future relevance and demand for languages, some of them more than others. For example, an increasing population of speakers of a certain language naturally increases the demand for the said language, since there are more people to do business with. For this purpose, a system needs to be made that weighs different factors differently. The weighted points-system will be introduced in the methodology section of the thesis.

2.7. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework below looks at the factors that affect the relevance of a language in international business.

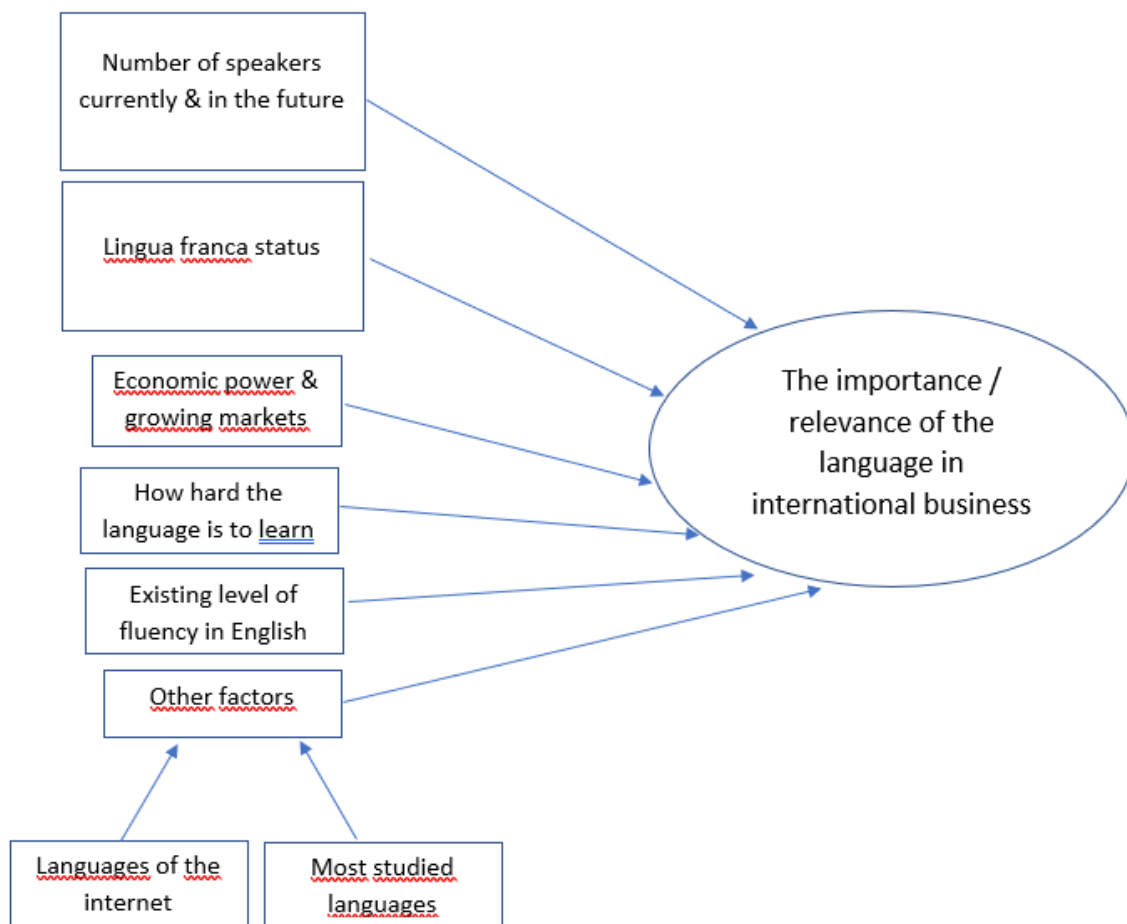


Figure 6: Conceptual framework

This framework will be applied twice in this study: first to find out the current top 10 list of languages, and later on, to speculate how the future top 10 list could look like. All the factors mentioned in the rectangles affect the future importance of the languages in international business environment, although, some more than others. Since the factors differ, a points system needs to be created to show the difference in emphasis between factors. The points system will be introduced thoroughly in the methodology section of the study.

For example, the number of speakers of the language and the extent of lingua franca status are given more value than the other categories. After all, all humans have basic needs that need to be fulfilled, thus assuring future business opportunities, so the importance number of speakers -factor is augmented. Also, if a language acts as a bridge to connect nations, it is considered more important, for which reason the importance of the lingua franca status -factor is also augmented. Languages got handed minus points depending on how hard the language is and for high levels of existing English fluency among the speakers of a certain

language. This decision was made because; first, the harder the language is, the more time it takes to learn it, which leads to a reduced number of people willing to learn it as a second language and the likelihood of it becoming a global lingua franca reduces. Second, as mentioned earlier in this report, if citizens of a certain country speak a global language, such as English, exceptionally fluently, there is a reduced incentive to learn the language of the nation in question. 'Other factors' is a combination of two categories: languages of the internet and the most studied languages. In other words, 'other factors' does not include other categories than the ones mentioned above.

3. Methodology and data

This thesis is a qualitative desk research and it was conducted using only secondary data. After collecting and analysing the data, information was divided into categories and then combined with the help of a self-developed points system.

3.1. Points system

A points system seemed like a necessary tool to combine data in order to get an idea of the bigger picture of the topic. Each of the factors that were chosen based on the direct or indirect impact they have on the relevance of a language. It is important to note that the points system does not include all the factors that affect the relevance of a language, some factors such as 'the political status of a language' were left out of inspection due to time constraints. The factors that were chosen all repeatedly emerged in literature as important, which is why the results could be considered valid.

However, it is important to note that the points system that was created is not perfect. It was quite difficult to allocate points rationally in certain categories where there was not a clear rubric to refer to. For example, in the category of language difficulty the points could be allocated based on FSI's language difficulty chart, but for some other categories, such charts did not exist.

The points system is utilized twice in this thesis; first to take a look at the current situation, and second, when forecasting the future.

The points system consists of the following factors:

Number of speakers

Plus 0-12 points based on the number of speakers of the language in question. 0 meaning the language in question has an extremely low number of speakers and 12 referring to an extremely high amount of speakers. More points are available for this factor, since it became clear in the literature review section that the number of speakers is one of the leading factors in the demand for a language.

Lingua franca status

Plus 0-12 points based on the extent to which a language acts as a lingua franca. 0 meaning that the language is spoken among the people of only one country, and 12 meaning that a language acts as a bridge in communication globally. More points are available for this factor, since it became clear in the literature review section that the lingua franca status affects the widespread use of the language in business directly.

Economic power & emerging markets

Plus 0-10 points based on the economic power of country/countries where a language is spoken and on the emergence of the country's market. 0 points meaning that countries where the language is spoken have low economic power and are not considered emerging markets, and 10 meaning that the countries are economic superpowers and/or are considered a big emerging market in the future. These two categories were combined since they are closely linked together. For this category, up to 10 points were given, since it turned out to be an important factor in predicting the demand of languages.

Difficulty of the language

Minus 3-10 points based on the difficulty of the language. The minus points were allocated in the following manner: -3 points for languages in the difficulty category 1 of FSI's language difficulty table, -5 points for languages in the difficulty category 2, and -10 points for languages in the category 3. Up to minus 10 points are allocated in this category since research shows that the difficulty of learning a language directly impacts the willingness of people to learn the language.

Existing English fluency

Minus 0-5 points based on the English fluency of the people who speak a certain language. 0 meaning that the citizens of countries where the language is spoken have 'very low' English proficiency according to EF's English proficiency index and 5 meaning that the citizens have 'very high' English proficiency according to EF. Up to 5 minus points are allocated in this category since research shows that it clearly affects the incentives to learn the language in question, but not quite as much as the difficulty of the language. English language will not receive any points in this category.

Other factors

Other factors is a combination of two factors: the languages of the internet and the most studied languages. These two categories were combined since they would not have accounted for many points by themselves and combining the two makes the points system graph have less columns, thus making it clearer. Plus 0-10 points are given for 'other factors' based on the languages relevance on the internet and the number of people who currently study the language in question. 0 points meaning that a language is not visible on the internet and that the language in question is not studied by a lot of people. 10 points meaning that a language is used as the main language of publications on the internet and that the language is studied by many people.

4. Analysis and findings

4.1. What makes a language 'big' in the future?

In this chapter, languages will be estimated with the future in mind. Projections of the future are made by analysing the future state of language by looking at trends and data. In order to make comparisons with future and the present, the same factors that were introduced in the literature review section are now analysed with the future in mind.

4.1.1. Evaluated number of speakers and the countries in which the language is spoken

Below are the projected future figures:

By 2100, five of the world's 10 largest countries are projected to be in Africa

Countries with largest population, in millions



Note: Countries are based on current borders. In this data source, China does not include Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan. Regions follow United Nations definitions and may differ from other Pew Research Center reports.

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2019."

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 7: Countries with largest population (Cilluffo, 2019)

Estimations made by the Pew Research Center show that India and China will likely experience huge surges in population, reaching almost 1,5 billion inhabitants by the end of 2020. China's population is expected to see a reduction of almost 300 million inhabitants by the year 2100, while India's population is projected to keep growing and eventually passing China to reach the number one spot on the list. These spikes will naturally have massive impact on the amount of native Mandarin and Hindi/Urdu speakers.

Many African countries are projected to experience the largest spikes in population by 2100. So much so, that all European countries are displaced from the top 10 list of 2100.

United states' population growth will likely stay steady, but it will lose its number three spot on the list to another English-speaking country, Nigeria.

Although France is nowhere to be seen on the list, the French language will prevail since D.R. Congo, a French-speaking country is expected to experience a huge surge in population.

Simply based on the future population statistics, the relevance of Spanish, Russian and Arabic in the international trade will be slightly reduced, as the respective countries they are spoken in will not see great growth in population numbers.

4.1.2. Economic power and emerging markets

Below is a figure of future economic forecasts.

Emerging markets will dominate the world's top 10 economies in 2050 (GDP at PPPs)

	2016	2050	
<i>China</i>	1	1	<i>China</i>
<i>US</i>	2	2	<i>India</i>
<i>India</i>	3	3	<i>US</i>
<i>Japan</i>	4	4	<i>Indonesia</i>
<i>Germany</i>	5	5	<i>Brazil</i>
<i>Russia</i>	6	6	<i>Russia</i>
<i>Brazil</i>	7	7	<i>Mexico</i>
<i>Indonesia</i>	8	8	<i>Japan</i>
<i>UK</i>	9	9	<i>Germany</i>
<i>France</i>	10	10	<i>UK</i>

E7 economies
 G7 economies

Sources: IMF for 2016 estimates, PwC analysis for projections to 2050

Figure 8: Biggest economies of the future (PwC, 2017)

Above estimations are made by PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers), based on the 2016 data by IMF (International Monetary Fund). In this context GDP stands for gross domestic product at purchasing power parity.

As of writing this thesis, USA and China are in a trade war, battling for the number one spot on the biggest economies list. According to PwC, China is expected to take the number 1

spot (PwC 2017). According to another source, Visual Capitalist, the future gap between the countries' GDP by PPP will be massive (Desjardins, 2019). See the figure below:

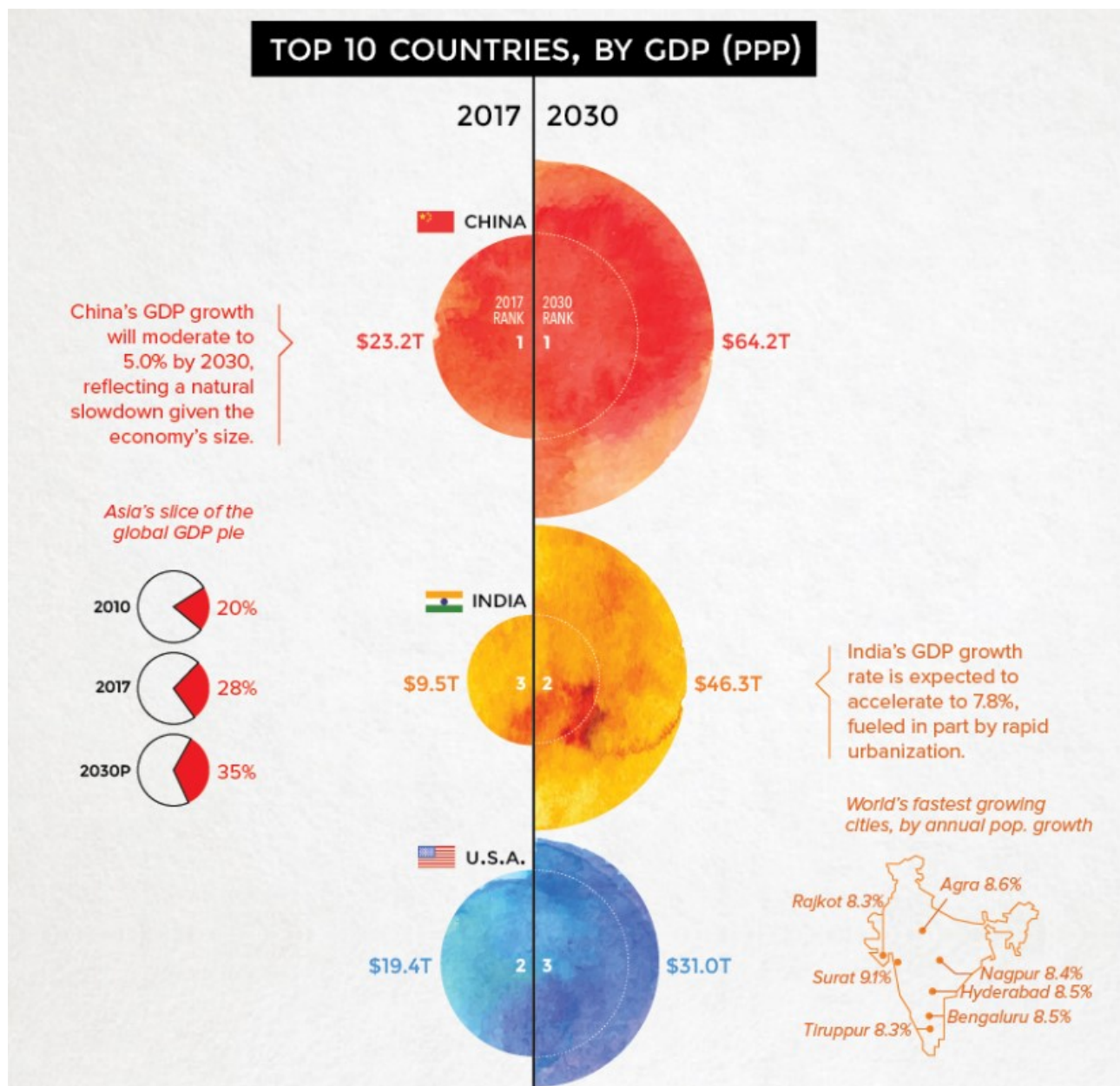


Figure 9: Top countries by GDP (Desjardins, 2019)

China's GDP (by PPP) is projected to reach a whopping 64.2 trillion dollars, twice as big of a number as USA's projected GDP. Chinese middle class is constantly growing, and the citizens are overall getting richer, which means that they'll have more income to spend on goods and traveling in the future (Li, 2006). Rich Chinese investors have recently invested massive sums of money in other continents, such as Europe and Africa (Meunier, 2014). Chinese investors' willingness to pay sometimes quite large premiums for the investments

has made some business owners worried about the future leverage and influence that the Chinese will have globally (Meunier, 2014). The growing purchasing power of Chinese consumers and the growing Chinese influence in western calls for increasing demand for Chinese-speaking businesspeople and ensures that knowing Mandarin Chinese will be a valuable asset in the future.

Despite the positive expectations on the GDP, China is bound to face several key economic issues. What made China's economy explode in the first place were the cheap labour costs that big western companies were seeking after. But now the situation has changed. Average real wages tripled in China from 1997 to 2007 (Yang, Chen and Monarch, 2010). And the wages are projected to keep growing. Due to the increased labour costs, among other reasons, some foreign investors are leaving China and taking their money elsewhere (Donaubauer and Dreger, 2018). Other factors causing westerners to leave China include censorship in media, political issues, pollution and widespread corruption (Donald, Keane and Yin, 2014). So, despite the overwhelmingly positive projections China's economic growth is receiving, it is unclear how much the factors mentioned above will slow down the progress, affecting the demand for the Chinese languages in the process.

India has slowly but surely crept its way up in the biggest economies ranking, recently becoming one of the three global superpowers alongside China and USA. The outsourcing of several high and low skills jobs to India and the massive amounts of money it received in the form of FDI made India the giant it is today (Maithra, 2017). According to the predictions made by both the IMF, and the Visual Capitalist, in the next decade, India will overtake USA and become the 2nd largest economy in the world. Similarly to China, fluent Hindi & other Indian language speakers will be in high demand in the future, due to the inevitable increase in purchasing power that the Indians are bound to experience.

However, in India the class structure still exists, and wealth is not distributed evenly by any means, which means that the rich will become even richer poor will stay poor (Data, 2016). India will face several challenges in the future ranging from limiting CO₂ emissions to having enough food to feed its ever-growing population (Gandhi and Zhou, 2014).

The world will not be as dependent of USA's economy in the future as it has been in the past century, but even with that being said, the land of the free is still expected to be a global superpower in the future and experience steady economic growth for years to come. Many

argue that population growth is directly related to economic growth, and USA's population growth is simply not on the same scale as the equivalents of countries with developing markets, which is why USA might lose influence in the future. (Peterson, 2017). The economies of other major English-speaking countries are expected to grow at stable pace as well, securing the English language's status as an important business language in the future (PwC 2017).

Many Spanish speaking countries in Latin America are categorized as emerging markets with huge potential (Peltonen, Sousa and Vansteenkiste, 2012). However, seemingly the potential has gone to waste in the past decade, as the countries have faced many sociologic and political challenges that interfered with the countries' economic growth (Bateman 2014). The countries have been stricken by crime, partially caused by the huge inequalities in income (Herzer, Hühne and Nunnenkamp, 2014). Despite the uneasiness in the region, the countries are expected to eventually unleash their full economic potential, which can be seen by Mexico grabbing the 7th place in the PwC future top economies list, making Spanish a relevant language in the future (PwC 2017).

Most Arab countries became rich largely due to the massive demand for oil, which they have plenty of. The economies of many Arab countries are too reliant on selling purely oil, which is not sustainable long-term in a world that is attempting to move away from using fossil fuels (Chu and Majumdar, 2012). However, the demand for oil will not completely end in the near future by any means and these countries have started an economic diversification to ease the hit that changing to greener energy will eventually blow (Stevens 2019) Only time will tell what effects these reforms will have on the economies of Arabic speaking countries and consequently the Arabic language.

France's economic growth has been fluctuating a lot in the past years it has still mostly remained at the pace of 1% - 2,5% a year, which is quite neutral in the grand scheme of things (IMF, 2019). According to PwC's future projections, France will not keep up with the pace of the economies of growing markets and loses its top 10 spot on the biggest economies list (PwC 2017). However, as discussed later in this report, among the emerging are markets are many French speaking countries, which might greatly strengthen the status of French as a global business language.

Germany is expected to remain as the “economic superstar” of Europe for years to come (Dustmann & et all., 2014), but it will lose leverage in the global scale, as it is estimated to fall to the number 9 spot in the biggest economies list (PwC, 2017).

Political instability, the Crimean crisis and sanctions have held Russia’s economy back for years now. Though, Russia has showed positive signs of turning the situation on its head (Medvedev, 2015). The PwC estimation ranks Russia as the 6th largest economy in 2050, the same spot it held in 2016 (PwC, 2017). The Russian speaking countries that were once under the control of Soviet Union are not exactly known for their booming economies, but they also do not have the same advanced infrastructure(s) that most western countries have (Hardt, 2016). With proper advances in that area, the countries could reach their full economic potential and further improve the position of the Russian language in the world of business.

In conclusion, the biggest economies are expected to keep growing with certainty, but many now smaller economies might drastically grow due to their emerging markets. The future of many economies depends on external factors and on how the local decisionmakers decide to combat the issues they are facing. In other words, the longer the time predicted time period is, the more inaccurate predictions are.

4.1.3. Lingua franca status in geographic areas

It takes many, many years for a language to gain lingua franca status or to increase its status into a more prominent one. While it is impossible to accurately predict the future, there are some clear language trends that might affect lingua franca status in some cases.

Spanish has huge potential to grow in status due to the increasing Hispanic population in the United States. According to the US census bureau, in 2017 there were already almost 59 million Hispanic/Latino people in the USA and the number is expected to keep growing in the future (US Census Bureau 2017).

French is very widespread especially in the countries of western Africa. Some of these countries are some of the biggest emerging markets (PwC 2017). French could raise its

status as global business language if it ends up being the combining factor among these markets, and if French is established as the norm trade language. Although, it is good to remember that the exact same statement could be made about English, which is also very prominent in Africa.

Since the amount of Chinese and Indian citizens is going to grow significantly, and because both groups speak relatively bad English according to EF's English proficiency global ranking, learning Mandarin or Hindi as a second language may very well become more common in the future.

English has become the established international business language, so it would only make sense for people to keep learning it in the future as well. No other language is as widespread in the current world, nor will be in the future if not for some major changes in world order. Since English is already the most studied language in the world, and since English is increasingly being taught in countries all over the world as a mandatory subject, it is difficult to see any other language reaching the prominent status of English in the foreseeable future.

4.1.4. How hard is the language to learn?

Languages are living beings and change over time, but the changes are slow and usually small, so the difficulty of a language does not really change over time. Below we will take a look at FSI's language difficulty ranking again.

Category I: Languages closely related to English 23-24 weeks (575-600 class hours)		
Danish	Italian	Romanian
Dutch	Norwegian	Spanish
French	Portuguese	Swedish
Category II: Languages with significant linguistic and/or cultural differences from English 44 weeks (1100 class hours)		
Albanian	Hebrew	Russian
Amharic	Hindi	Serbian
Armenian	*Hungarian	Sinhalese
Azerbaijani	Icelandic	Slovak
Bengali	Khmer	Slovenian
Bosnian	Lao	Tagalog
Bulgarian	Latvian	*Thai
Burmese	Lithuanian	Turkish
Croatian	Macedonian	Ukrainian
Czech	*Mongolian	Urdu
*Estonian	Nepali	Uzbek
*Finnish	Pashto	*Vietnamese
*Georgian	Persian	Xhosa
Greek	Polish	Zulu
Category III: Languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers 88 weeks (2nd year of study in-country) (2200 class hours)		
Arabic	Mandarin	Korean
Cantonese	*Japanese	
Other languages		
German	30 weeks (750 class hours)	
Indonesian, Malaysian, Swahili	36 weeks (900 class hours)	

* Languages preceded by asterisks are typically somewhat more difficult for native English speakers to learn than other languages in the same category.

Table 6: Language difficulty [2] (FSI, n.d.)

Spanish and French are in category one, taking approximately 600 class hours to learn. They are relatively easy to learn and could be picked up quite quickly if they are required for business.

Hindi and Russian are in category two, taking approximately 1100 class hours to learn. They are moderately difficult to learn and picking the languages up for does not happen suddenly. Learning them takes a lot of time and effort, which bring up a case of opportunity cost.

Arabic and Mandarin Chinese are in category three, taking approximately 2200 class hours to learn (given that the 2nd year of study is completed in a country where the language is spoken), twice as many hours as category two languages. They are extremely hard to learn and have features that many easier languages do not, such as tones, different characters, or writing. Reaching fluency in any of the category three languages requires a huge time investment and the opportunity cost is massive. Reaching 2200 class hours would require two hours of studying each day for three years. It could be argued that Investing the same

number of hours to learn different skills would be a wiser choice. Learning this type of language would be smarter to learn to over a long period of time, preferably starting from a young age at school.

How long it takes to become fluent in English changes quite a bit depending on the source. Researcher Feyisa Demie suggests that it takes pupils 5-7 years to reach academic fluency when attending English classes a few times a week (Demie, 2013). On the CEFR scale it takes around 200 hours to master each level from A1 to C2 To put this into hours it could mean 800-1200 hours of studying depending on how “fluent” is defined and what kind of language learning background the student has (Council of Europe). This would make English about as difficult to learn as Hindi or Russian. Learning English at school has become the norm in most modern countries so the 1200 hours investment seems to be worth it. English enjoys a role that other languages do not, in the sense that one can have mass exposure to the sounds of English anywhere in the world. One of the most important factors of learning a language is being immersed, simply hearing the language being spoken makes one’s brain combine patterns subconsciously and thus making the learning process easier (Dhandapani, 2014).

While the graph made by FSI is directive and good at indicating the overall idea of language difficulty, it has its downfalls. First of all, does a speaker need to be completely fluent in order to enjoy the benefits of knowing the language? Some people might be very pleased to notice that a person from a different country has taken the time to learn their language, even if the person does not speak it fluently. The same applies to a business setting, even if interpreters are used in international business meetings, it is often preferred that a company’s representative has a decent grasp of the other party’s language.

4.1.5. The need for language other than English, citizens’ fluency in other languages

The figure below introduces the English proficiency of citizens of different countries.

Very High Proficiency			High Proficiency			Moderate Proficiency					
01	Netherlands	70.27	15	Hungary	61.86	30	Costa Rica	57.38	39	Uruguay	54.08
02	Sweden	68.74	16	Romania	61.36	31	France	57.25	40	China	53.44
03	Norway	67.93	17	Serbia	61.30	32	Latvia	56.85	41	Macau, China	53.34
04	Denmark	67.87	18	Kenya	60.51	33	Hong Kong, China	55.63	42	Chile	52.89
05	Singapore	66.82	19	Switzerland	60.23	34	India	55.49	43	Cuba	52.70
06	South Africa	65.38	20	Philippines	60.14	35	Spain	55.46	44	Dominican Republic	52.58
07	Finland	65.34	21	Lithuania	60.11	36	Italy	55.31	45	Paraguay	52.51
08	Austria	64.11	22	Greece	59.87	37	South Korea	55.04	46	Guatemala	52.50
09	Luxembourg	64.03	23	Czech Republic	59.30	38	Taiwan, China	54.18			
10	Germany	63.77	24	Bulgaria	58.97						
11	Poland	63.76	25	Slovakia	58.82						
12	Portugal	63.14	26	Malaysia	58.55						
13	Belgium	63.09	27	Argentina	58.38						
14	Croatia	63.07	28	Estonia	58.29						
			29	Nigeria	58.26						

Figure 10: English proficiency index [2] (EF, 2019)

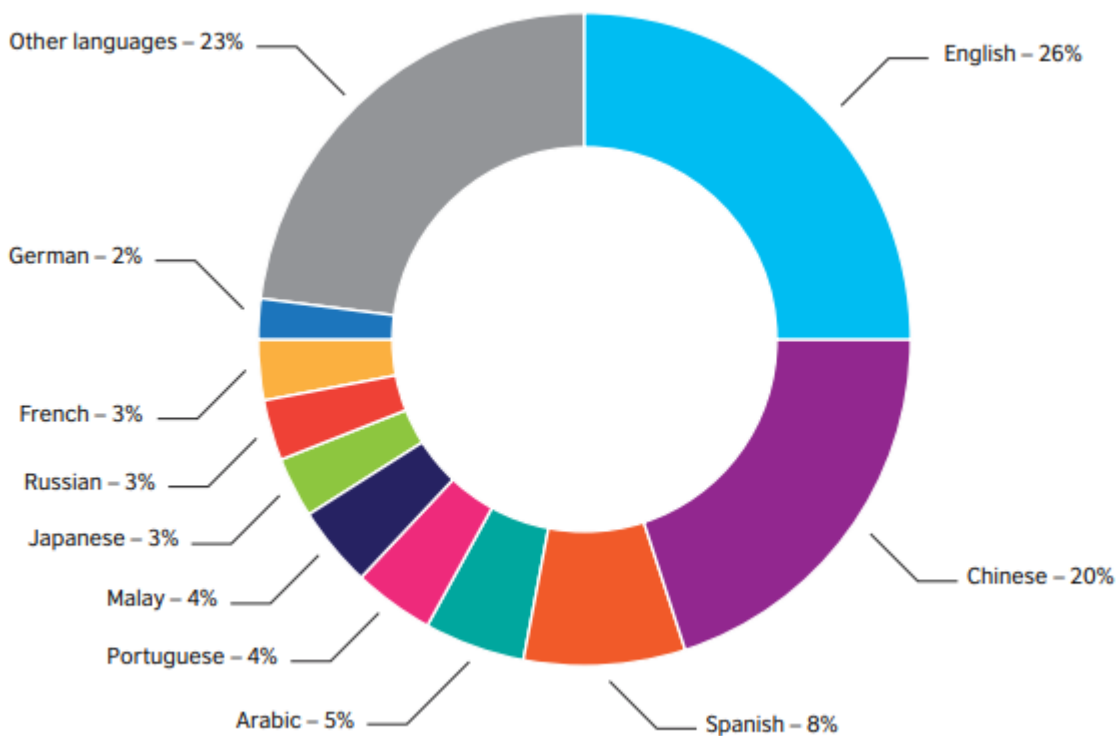
As can be seen from the figure, in Europe, the level of English proficiency is relatively high in most countries, downplaying the need of European languages in international business, whereas Asian and Latin American have moderate English proficiency on average (EF, 2019). In contrast, in most African and Middle East -countries, the level of English proficiency is relatively low, decreasing the role of English and increasing the role of the local languages. However, it is important to note that as English is the most studied language in the world, so consequently the English proficiency numbers are expected to increase over time.

4.1.6. Other factors (languages on the internet & most studied languages)

Languages of internet

Below is British Council's figure regarding the languages of the internet.

Chart 13: Internet use by language 2017



Source: Internet World Stats ⁷¹

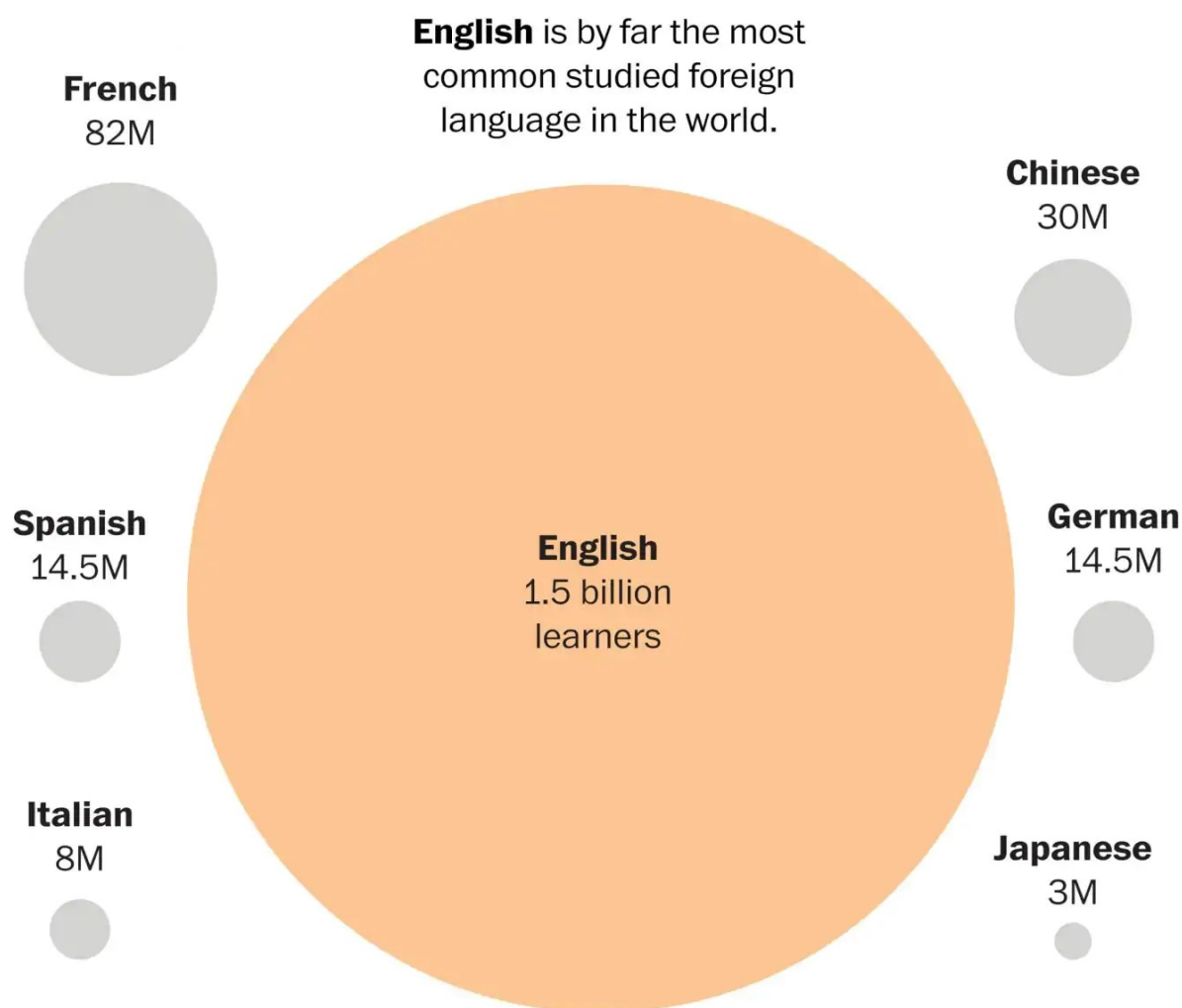
Figure 11: Internet use by language 2017 [2] (British council, 2017)

As said in the literature review regarding the above figure, English and Chinese are the two biggest languages of the internet. As of future trends, it is reasonable to assume that the amount of English content on the internet is bound grow, since it is the most studied language in the world. Also, the growth of available information in a language could be linked with the number of speakers that a given language has, so the amount of information in Hindi and Indonesian could grow significantly in the future.

Knowing just English already gives a huge advantage when it comes to having access to information that one can understand. Knowing Chinese and Spanish, among other language, could help in finding information as well, but it is good to note that the information overlaps in different languages.

Most studied languages

Below, a graph introduces the most studied languages in the world.



Sources: Ulrich Ammon, University of Düsseldorf

THE WASHINGTON POST

Figure 12: Most studied languages [2] (Ammon, 2013)

It is important to take into consideration, what languages people are studying, since, the languages that are studied today will be spoken in the future.

As can be seen from the figure, English is by far the most studied language in the world, with estimated 1,5 billion active learners. The whopping number of learners will only add to the prevalence that the English language has established recently.

There's a huge gap between English and the second most studied language. The next most studied language is French, with 82 million learners, so for every French student, there are 20 other English students. Although 82 million is a relatively small number, it is still a significant amount that assures the relevance of French in the future.

Besides the aforementioned two languages, there are 30 million Mandarin Chinese learners, and around 15 million Spanish and German learners. The lack of Chinese learners might be due to the language's notorious difficulty. Meanwhile there are surprisingly few Spanish learners when considering the growing relevance of the language.

explain the

4.2. Top 10 lists

Top 10 current languages

Utilizing the newly made points system and the information found in the literature review - section, below are the current top 10 languages of the world.

Current	Number of speakers	Lingua franca status	Economic power & EM	Other factors	Difficulty of the language	Existing English fluency	Total
English	12	12	10	10	-5	0	39
Spanish	8	8	5	6	-3	-2	22
Chinese	12	3	10	8	-10	-3	20
French	3	9	5	7	-3	-3	18
Hindi	7	3	8	3	-5	-3	13
Arabic	6	9	5	4	-10	-1	13
German	3	7	7	5	-4	-5	13
Russian	4	6	5	4	-5	-2	12
Portuguese	4	6	4	4	-3	-3	12
Japanese	4	2	7	4	-10	-2	5

Table 7: Top 10 current languages

English is clearly the top language at the moment, no other language comes even close. A massive number of speakers, established lingua franca status globally and economic power of the countries where it is an official language make English an unstoppable force. Spanish takes the number two spot thanks to its solid influence in every category as well as since it is a relatively easy language. Chinese and Arabic are held back in the standings largely due to their notorious difficulty. The amount of time that is required to put into learning those languages reduces the attractiveness of the two languages even if they do great in the other factors. The current list includes quite a lot of European languages, but their spots may very well be overtaken in the future list

Top 10 future languages

Below is a table of the estimated top 10 languages of the future, based on the weighted points-system.

Future	Number of speakers	Lingua franca status	Economic power & EM	Other factors	Difficulty of the language	Existing English fluency	Total
English	12	12	8	10	-5	0	37
Spanish	8	8	6	6	-3	-2	23
Hindi	11	4	10	5	-5	-3	22
Chinese	11	4	10	8	-10	-3	20
French	6	7	5	7	-3	-3	19
Portuguese	5	6	6	3	-3	-3	14
Russian	5	6	5	4	-5	-2	13
Arabic	5	8	5	4	-10	-1	11
German	5	6	5	4	-4	-5	11
Indonesian	5	4	6	2	-4	-2	11

Table 8: Top 10 future languages

English is not going anywhere, even though the economies of India and China are expected leave United States in their shadow. English's status is simply so established that other languages cannot reach its relevance, and the 1,5 billion English learners make sure that the language stays on top for years to come. The growing Latino population in North America and the emerging economies of Latin America secure second place to the Spanish language. Hindi climbs to the number three spot of the list. Since India's population and economy are expected to boom, and since the language is only moderately difficult to learn, Hindi might very well become a major global business language in the future. It is good to note that Hindi's future is largely dependent on India's government's language policies and the surrounding countries' willingness to adopt the language. Chinese drops to the number four spot, as the language's future seems quite unclear. The extreme difficulty combined with China not being as attractive place to do business in anymore reduce the language's overall relevance. Many European languages remain on the top 10 least, although most of them lose at least a few spots. Only time will tell how the economic power shift to the east will affect the state of the European languages. Indonesian makes an appearance on the bottom of the list, but it is important to note that the estimations concerning the language were careful, and for a good reason. If Indonesia's market starts blooming as estimated, the local language will massively increase in relevance, but only if the economic forecasts hold true.

4.3. Addressing research questions and research problem

The research questions of this study were:

1. What languages will be the most relevant in international business in the future?

Currently the most relevant languages are English, Spanish, Chinese and French. In the future the most relevant languages will be English, Spanish, Hindi and Chinese

2. What languages would be the most useful to learn for international business purposes?

The language that is the most useful obviously depends on the purpose for learning the language and the location where one lives. But besides that, general advice can be given. English is the obvious choice as the go-to language for international business, but knowing English is more of a requirement than a perk. Having the future in I would not necessarily recommend learning Chinese. Instead, I would recommend studying the languages of the emerging markets, such as Spanish (for Latin America), Hindi or even Indonesian. After all, emerging markets is where the future of business lies.

3. What are the main criteria for evaluating the importance of individual languages for IB?

Although it was not directly stated in related literature that some factors are the most important ones, the following factors constantly emerged in the literature: number of speakers, economic power of countries where the language is spoken, lingua franca status and language difficulty. In addition, a few factors were added to increase the depth and the accuracy of the research.

The research problem of this study was:

What criteria should be used to determine the relative importance of a language for international business?

A set of business-oriented criteria should be developed to create a scoring system for the evaluation of the importance of individual languages for IB.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

English seems to be here to stay as the business lingua franca, now and in the future. It is hard to see its position being overtaken by some other language due to its established status as the borderless language, the amount of people learning it currently, and since the language is not that difficult to learn. What seems to be holding back major languages such as Mandarin Chinese and Arabic is the intense difficulty of learning them. The time and dedication needed to learn those languages would require planned learning over a long period of time, they are not languages that can be picked up quickly. On the other hand, the romance languages, such as Spanish and French are not going anywhere, despite my initial suspicions. They are relatively easy to pick up and are quite popular among language learners, and thus have a solid-looking future. It is difficult to predict the future of languages such as Russian and Portuguese, since their status appears to depend a lot on whether the economic predictions become reality. Hindi's future state also depends plenty on India's governments actions; will they continue to impose Hindi as the connecting language in India, or will they embrace the large pool of minority languages they have? Chinese was predicted to become the next big global language alongside English but various factors, such as, increased labour costs, the ongoing trade war with the USA, and the current corona virus pandemic, have caused many western companies to pull out of China, and thus reduced the incentives of learning Mandarin Chinese. Also, as mentioned earlier in the report, the Chinese youth speaks increasingly better English, which lowers the need for westerners to learn Chinese. Arabic's future state is quite dependent on if the rich Arab countries manage to maintain their wealth or not. As business moves into new, emerging markets, new opportunities arise for languages to grow in relevance. One potent language of the future could very well be Indonesian / Malay. The future of smaller European languages is still quite unclear. As long as Germany maintains its role as the economic superpower of Europe,

German's status is secured, but same cannot be said about other European countries, whose economic future does not look as good.

While comparing the current and future top 10 languages lists, it is clear that some major and some minor changes will happen in the language hierarchy. English will remain as the clear go-to language for business, followed by Spanish. India's forecasted population boom might very well make Hindi a major global language in the future, given that the Indian government emphasizes Hindi over the country's other languages. Thus, Hindi climbs to the number three spot on the future languages list. Other major changes include Portuguese taking over the number six spot on the future list, largely due to the favourable economic forecasts of Brazil's future. Japanese is currently a useful language to know, since despite all the negative forecasts, Japan is still one of the biggest economies in the world. What drops Japanese from the future list, is the country's isolated nature and the grim expert predictions of Japan's future; Japan's population is aging, and the birth rate is at an all-time low. Indonesian takes the number 10 spot in the future languages list. Because Indonesia is expected to experience a large boom in population, the country is one of the most promising emerging markets, and since Indonesian and Malay are mutually intelligible, knowing Indonesian might become a very valuable asset in the business world in the future.

The results of this study could be utilized in various cases. A business student could refer to the future graphs when deciding which language to learn for purely career-related purposes. A multinational organization might benefit from utilizing the results in decision-making related to the need of language education for its employees. However, one major key takeaway of this study is that one can never go wrong with learning English. In the globalization era, knowing English is, and will be a necessity if one wishes to do international business, and most likely more and more companies will make English the sole official internal language.

The results found with this method of research should be considered within the boundaries of the study. There are a lot of factors that affect the relevance of a language, and they all could not possibly be considered in a study like this. The advantages of this research are that it takes the main factors that affect the importance of a language, and combines them via a points system, resulting in data that can be easily interpreted. It is also good to note that there does not seem to be a consensus regarding the factors that are the most important

when considering the relevance of a language. In the case of this study, the factors were chosen and emphasized by reading between the lines of scientific journals, with the addition of a grain of unconscious bias, most likely. What factor is more important than the other was not directly stated in the scientific literature but rather indirectly implied. There was not a list of the most important factors that affect a language's relevance, but certain factors kept repeatedly arising in the literature concerning the topic. Changing any one factor or the emphasis of a factor could change the results of this study drastically. If someone was to continue the research, I would suggest adding more factors and considering the emphasis of the factors more. As time goes on, more accurate predictions of the future can be made.

The findings of this study challenge what the media has constantly said over the past 10 or so years: learning Chinese is the second-best option in terms of learning a language purely for business. That is not necessarily true, there are many reasons not to study Chinese, as mentioned in this study. If I were to give advice to a business student considering which language to start studying, I would not recommend learning Chinese. Instead, I would recommend studying the languages of the emerging markets, such as Spanish (for Latin America), Hindi or even Indonesian. After all, emerging markets is where the future of business lies.

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